



Agri-News

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Dr. Medhat Nasr Receives 2009 Achievement Award from the Alberta Beekeepers

The Alberta Beekeepers 2009 Achievement Award was presented to Dr. Medhat Nasr, Alberta provincial apiculturist, at the association's annual President's luncheon on November 4, 2009.

Nasr has given countless hours to ensure a sustainable future for the beekeeping industry in Alberta. He has a passion for his work that has allowed him to overcome countless setbacks and has enabled him to find needed funding for various research projects, to help create a stronger beekeeping industry in Alberta.

Since 2002, when he started working with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, he has pulled Alberta to the Canadian forefront in terms of bee research and activism. He changed the program from being a regulatory program to include applied research and extension. He has also researched, developed and published studies on oxalic acid and its application, formic acid and thymol products as alternative treatments for varroa mites.

Terry Greidanus, president of Alberta Beekeepers Commission, remarked that Nasr has fought tooth-and-nail to ensure Alberta beekeepers have access to effective miticides to control varroa mites, and continues to research potential miticides, such as Apivar and Checkmite, that will be effective under Alberta conditions.

To educate and inform beekeepers on different systems of beekeeping and management practices, every February Nasr brings together renowned scientists from all over the globe to his annual Integrated Pest Management workshop. In addition he hosts the popular annual Beeginners Beekeeping course at the Crop Development Centre North, where he educates future beekeepers on beekeeping practices in Alberta.

Nasr has headed a research project with Alberta Food Safety Division looking at antibiotic residues in Alberta honey to ensure that there is no misuse of treatments. Thus, Alberta honey meets consumers' expectation of high premium quality and safety. These efforts have paid off and resulted in an increase in exports of Alberta honey to the U.S., Japan and other European countries.

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This year, with the help of the Alberta Beekeepers, the hybrid canola pollination industry and with the support of Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund (ACIDF), beekeeping companies and Growing Forward funds, Nasr established a team that is developing and implementing a honey bee pest surveillance program throughout Alberta. This proactive program was created to deal with reported high winter losses and to improve honey bee health. At the early phase of this project, over 75 per cent of Alberta commercial beekeepers have participated in this program.

In addition to his work with Alberta Agriculture, Nasr serves as a chair of the bee imports committee with the Canadian Association of Professional Apiculturists and is a liaison with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. He also serves as a member of the Honey Bee Health committee – Canadian Honey Council and as a director for Canada with Apiary Inspectors of America, a regulatory and enforcement group in the U.S. He also works closely with other apiculture research institutes, commercial and hobby beekeepers in Canada and the U.S.

The Alberta beekeeping industry is crucial to Alberta's \$350 million canola and forage industries. In addition, the direct farm cash receipts from apiculture (honey, beeswax, pollen and pollination rental fees) are valued at about \$50 million per year. Alberta keeps 250,000 bee colonies that account for 40 per cent of the nation's bee colonies.

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Marketing Canola: Business Speculation

This year's canola crop came in late and was grown in conditions that varied considerably throughout the province. Now that the crop is in the bin, producers have to decide if it's time to move un-priced canola.

"Conditions during the 2009 canola harvest varied as much as the growing season did," says David Wong, with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. "Some of this year's canola crop was harvested in record high temperatures during September, with other harvesting done late in wet and muggy conditions. Now, with the crop harvested and stored, producers may not want to take a chance on spoilage. While canola may have gone in dry, a few hot spots in a bin can result in spoilage to more than just a couple of bushels."

Business speculation may be a strategy producers should consider in years when such variable conditions occur. The conditions that should be noted this fall include:

- canola may not be in storable condition and could deteriorate in the bin
- there is a belief that there is upswing in the future for canola prices

"Producers can 'business speculate' with canola and possibly take advantage of the above conditions," says Wong. "To do a business speculation with canola, simply sell the canola into the cash market and replace the volume on paper with an ICE canola futures position."

In simple terms, producers would haul their canola to a buyer (getting a price including a basis level), and then get the broker to buy the producer the equivalent amount of canola in the futures market.

"One of the advantages of this move is that it eliminates the possibility of the canola spoiling in bins because the physical canola has been sold to the local market," says Wong. "The basis level has recently widened for canola. Until the Chinese 'blackleg' situation occurred a few weeks ago, basis levels were very attractive. With the exception of domestic canola crusher basis levels, canola buyers who do export business have weakened their basis levels. Despite weaker current basis levels, 'business speculation' with canola is still a viable alternative marketing tool.

"Keeping canola in the bin because of an expected increase in the price of canola, is in fact, 'speculating' with canola in the bin. By selling cash canola now, and taking a futures position (e.g., buy March ICE canola futures), producers are still speculating, but are now doing so with paper.

"If March canola futures go up, producers will gain the difference between when they bought and when they 'pull the trigger' (get out of futures position). However, if canola futures drop, so does the value of the futures position. It's important to keep in mind that this is what would have happened to the canola if it was kept in the bin, as a drop in canola futures results in a drop in value of the net worth of that bin of canola as well."

Producers need a commodity futures broker to do this transaction!

"By selling 'cash canola' now, producers will have cash flow sooner," says Wong. "The canola futures position requires only about five per cent of the canola value as security, so the rest of the canola value can be used for other business purposes."

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Bill 50 – What is it and What Does it Mean for Rural Albertans?

Bill 50 is the *Electric Statutes Amendment Act 2009*. The Provincial Energy Strategy identified the need for the Government of Alberta to take action to substantially upgrade the province's electrical transmission system. The first step in this process was the introduction of Bill 50 in the Legislature on June 1, 2009 and passed its second reading on November 18, 2009. On November 19, 2009, amendments on Bill 50 were introduced.

The focus of these five amendments is staging, cost oversight and public interest. The five amendments clarify the provincial regulator must consider the public interest in the decisions it makes on the siting of the critical transmission infrastructure projects; provide for the establishment of a cost oversight committee; and clarify the Bill 50 projects that will be spaced out over time, addressing the concerns expressed about consumers' costs.

Bill 50 proposes that the Government of Alberta take on the responsibility of approving the need for critical transmission infrastructure projects, which is being described as being no different than government approval of other publicly needed infrastructure such as highways, schools and hospitals.

Alberta's transmission system has been working at or near its limits for extended periods of time, increasing the risk of widespread power outages and unreliable service. No major transmission upgrades have been built in more than 20 years.

"What landowners need to understand about Bill 50 is that there is nothing in this bill that removes any of the landowner rights," says Hon. Mel Knight, Alberta's Energy Minister. "The Alberta Utilities Commission is mandated to work in the public interest and will hear all of the concerns that come through interveners as the applications move through permitting and licensing stage and the commission will look at all of the siting, compensation, health and safety issues. All of the safeguards in this process will remain in place and the opportunity for landowners to be heard at that stage of the process remains in place."

Bill 50 provides government the authority to approve the need for critical transmission infrastructure, meaning that the Government of Alberta will be responsible for approving the need for major transmission lines. Bill 50 does not change the province's commitment to ensuring an open and transparent siting process. The Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) will continue to be responsible for making decisions on the siting of transmission facilities, including determining the specific

location for individual power lines, and Albertans will still be able to provide input on where specific transmission lines are located.

Further information on Bill 50 and several fact sheets, including a conceptual map of the proposed critical system upgrades can be found on Alberta Energy's website at www.energy.alberta.ca/Electricity/1607.asp

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Assessing Feed Quality

If feed quality has not been established and isn't known, producers can't efficiently feed their livestock over the winter, and feed efficiency is extremely important not only to the animals being fed but to a livestock operation's bottom-line. A feed analysis can help stretch out good quality feed and provide direction for supplementing poor quality feeds.

"Knowing the quality of your livestock's winter feed is critical to developing a proper feeding program," says Dr. Susan Markus, beef specialist and sheep nutritionist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. "A feed analysis by a credible lab will give you most of that information on quality. However, how you sample and what you sample are the two largest sources of error. To take a representative sample that reflects the field or the "lot" means gathering samples from throughout that batch. Ideally, you should take a sample from each field that was harvested in a day, that way the batch will be most uniform for maturity, rain damage and other contributing factors.

"A round hay bale is not uniform in composition, so taking a core sample which takes material from across the layers from the curved outside part to the inside core is a better representative sample than grabbing hand samples from the edges. For small square bales, sample through the center of either end as leaves become concentrated on the tight side of the bale."

Chopped silage can be sampled prior to covering the pit since the quality remains fairly similar if the material ensiles (goes through a pH drop). However, if the material is suspect as far as ensiling is concerned, allow at least three to four weeks for the ensiling process to complete before sampling. Once the pit is opened, take five to eight grab samples from the clean face of the pit. Be sure to label containers or bags. Immediately refrigerate the sample to stabilize the temperature. Samples can be frozen unless testing for mold (freezing may alter mold counts). To avoid having samples sit in the post office or lab over the weekend, do not ship samples late in the week. Call the Ag Info Centre for a list of labs that can analyze feeds.

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“A visual assessment is a good place to start,” says Markus. “The leaves or leafiness of plants generally translate into protein. The more leaves, the higher the protein content. Mature plants have more fibre, and higher fiber levels translate into lower energy values. The colour alone doesn’t tell you a whole lot about quality. Just because the feed is green doesn’t mean it is high in nutrients. The pH in silages is very important (typically good silage has a pH between 5.0-5.5) and a yellowy-green to brown colour. If the pH in silage is not in this range then you cannot count on having it around longer than four to six months before it will spoil.”

Once quality is analyzed, rations can be formulated to meet the needs of the livestock. For mature cattle, energy as reported in total digestible nutrients (TDN) or digestible energy (DE) is extremely important, followed by crude protein. It is important to also check the minerals, vitamins and water source as it can be a significant contributor of minerals to the animal’s ration.

“Consulting with a nutritionist will help you balance the rations,” says Markus. “Alternatively, you can do it yourself using *CowBytes*, an Alberta Agriculture’s software program. Basically, roughages with about 7 to 10 per cent crude protein and 56 to 60 per cent TDN will provide the protein and energy a spring calving cow requires in the fall and early winter. If pregnant cows are provided some trace mineralized salt and a 2:1 mineral mixed together, minerals should be adequate. One source of mineral with the salt mixed in is the best way to go to get adequate consumption. Low energy feeds can be supplemented with grain.”

Dry matter intake (DMI) varies with different feeds, especially high fibre feeds such as straw, which have lower dry matter intakes. Typically, cows will consume 2.25 per cent of their body weight on a dry matter basis each day. That would be equivalent to 30 lbs of dry feed for a 1300 lb cow, or on an as fed basis it amounts to 35 lbs of 15 per cent moisture hay or 75 lbs of 60 per cent moisture silage.

DMI of good straw (barley and oats) is only about 1.5 per cent of body weight; poor straw (wheat and canola) 1.25 per cent; excellent hay 2.5 per cent; and good hay 2.0 per cent. The DMI for poor hay is 1.7 per cent; and for good silage it is 10 to 20 per cent less than comparable hay.

“First calf heifers cannot eat as much straw as mature animals as a per cent of body weight,” says Markus. “On the other hand, older cows will eat more feed as a per cent of their body weight compared to younger animals.

“A final note, rations need to be adjusted for changes in the weather, particularly cold stress (temperatures below -20° C) where either more feed or a better quality of feed may be necessary.”

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Agri-News Briefs

Pasture School

Session 5 of the Pasture School Series is being held at the Forestburg Community Hall, Forestburg, on December 2, 2009. This one-day event starts at 9:30 a.m. and concludes at approximately 4:00 p.m. Topics on the agenda include:

- economics
- bale grazing
- swath grazing
- backgrounding feeders

Registration cost for the day is \$15 per person, lunch is included. For further information or to register, contact Quinton Beaumont, County of Paintearth, at 403-882-3211; Tim Nelner, Battle River Research Group at 1-866-828-6774; or, Lindsey Catherwood, Flagstaff County at 1-877-387-4100.

Alberta Barley Commission AGM

The Alberta Barley Commission (ABC) will be holding their 18th annual general meeting in Banff on December 11, 2009.

Presentation topics on the agenda include:

- challenges and potential for private investors in barley breeding in Canada
- barley as a biofuel and a bioproduct
- how producers can sell their barley for maximum return
- capturing more value from the malt value chain
- how ABC delivers value to Alberta's barley producers

Registration deadline for this AGM is December 3, 2009. For more information and to register, go to the ABC website at www.albertabarley.com/index.html

Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC) Seeking Executive Director

The Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC) Calgary regional office has an immediate opening for an executive director to manage this association. AFAC has been operating since 1993 and is considered one of the leading animal welfare organizations in Canada, working closely with other provincial farm animal care organizations. The successful applicant will be a strong individual who can lead the AFAC team into the next generation of development and who will report to the AFAC chair representing its 18-member board. The Executive Director will develop and promote AFAC's services, work with industry groups, develop and strengthen relationships with government officials, researchers, various media outlets, consumers, funding agencies and regulatory bodies, and coordinate the activities of various independent project contractors to meet their goals and deadlines. Experience in project management, agricultural production practices, animal care and behaviour and working with the public and media will be given strong consideration by the selection committee. Applications will be received until December 11, 2009. Applicants are asked to send expressions of interest in the form of a covering letter accompanied by their resumé to Mr. Doug Sawyer, chairman of the board, by e-mail to dougs@abpinsider.org